

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PREPARATION OF SUBSTITUTE
ASSISTANT CHIEFS**

Executive Leadership

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ABSTRACT

The problem addressed by this project was the lack of training and a training program for the substitute or “fill-in” assistant chief. This is the highest-ranking officer working a 24-hour shift in the fire operations division. All 3 of the shifts have recently or will soon see a change in the primary substitute for the assistant chief.

The purpose of this research was to define the key performance requirements for the position of substitute Duluth Fire assistant chief. Once those requirements were defined, an assessment of substitute preparation was completed. Descriptive research was used to answer the following questions:

1. What are the critical tasks performed by a Duluth Fire Department assistant chief?
2. What deficiencies exist in the training/preparation for substitute assistant chiefs?
3. Specifically, what should be the focus of improving the status quo?
4. What role do the assistant chiefs, training officer, and fire administration have in improvement efforts?

Procedures followed during the course of this project included data collection regarding the history and role of the assistant chief/substitute assistant chief position. Comprehensive personal interviews with assistant chiefs, substitutes, fire chief, deputy fire chief, lead fire investigator, and select company officers provided the majority of study data.

The results of this research all pointed toward the importance of a comprehensive incident command/incident management-training program for the substitute assistant chiefs. Recommendations focused on a department-wide commitment toward incident management education and practice.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS	3
INTRODUCTION	4
BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE	5
LITERATURE REVIEW	8
PROCEDURES	14
RESULTS	20
DISCUSSION	29
RECOMMENDATIONS	33
REFERENCES	35
APPENDIX A	37
Assistant Chief Job Announcement	
APPENDIX B	39
Assistant Chief Position Description	
APPENDIX C	40
Interview Questions and Answers	

INTRODUCTION

The city of Duluth, Minnesota is an old industrial port city. It sits at the western tip of Lake Superior. In the mid-1800's, Duluth was one of the fastest growing cities in the Midwest. Lumber and iron ore were the source of wealth in the region. Today, the economy is based on tourism. Duluth struggles to diversify its economy. Left behind from its "glory" days is an aging stock of commercial and residential structures. A large percentage of these buildings are in fair to poor condition. 131 full-time firefighters provide protection for the community. They are based out of 9 fire stations on apparatus staffed by between 1 and 3 personnel. 38 firefighters work on each of the 3 shifts. They protect a narrow-26-mile long city. Duluth has a young fire department. A majority of the members have less than 10 years experience. This is a dramatic shift from the 25 to 30 years of experienced people retiring in the past several years.

Old buildings, poorly staffed apparatus, and inexperienced firefighters create a host of challenges familiar to many fire departments across the United States. The problem addressed by this project is the lack of training and a training program for the substitute or "fill-in" assistant chiefs. This position is the highest-ranking officer working a 24-hour shift in the operations division. All 3 of the shifts have recently or will soon see a change in the individual who is the primary cover for the regular assistant chief.

The purpose of this project is to define the key performance requirements for the position of substitute Duluth Fire Assistant Chief. Once these requirements are defined, an assessment of regular and substitute assistant chief preparation will be completed.

Recommendations for improvement follow this assessment. Several specific research questions provide the framework for addressing this problem.

These questions are:

1. What are the critical tasks performed by a Duluth Fire Department assistant chief?
2. What deficiencies exist in the training/preparation for substitute assistant chiefs?
3. Specifically, what should be the focus of improving the status quo?
4. What roles do each of the following play in improvement efforts?
 - a. assistant chiefs
 - b. training office/officer
 - c. fire administration

They will be answered through a descriptive research process.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

On February 27, 1990, attorney William Berquist, acting as an impartial arbitrator ruled that a senior Captain was entitled to be assigned to the temporary vacancy in the Assistant Chief classification (Local 101 v. City of Duluth, 1990). This ruling was the result of a grievance filed on behalf of a senior fire captain on the Duluth fire department. Fire Chief Lawrence Bushey had ordered that the grievant not be used as a substitute assistant chief. Past department practice filled this temporary vacancy with the most senior fire captain working on the shift with the vacancy. Chief Bushey felt that the individual in question was not the best qualified for the position. Since this ruling, all

openings for substitute assistant chief have been filled by the senior Captain desiring the out-of-class position. No qualifications, other than seniority are used to select substitutes.

In mid-1999, the senior fire captain filling in for a regular assistant chief on vacation allowed a house to burn to the ground. Many firefighters on the scene of this fire, felt that the acting assistant chief made several poor decisions. An investigation by the fire chief and deputy fire chief resulted in a mandate that prohibited this senior fire captain from the substitute assistant chief position until he had completed an acceptable incident command training program. Pressure from the labor union on the fire chief resulted in his reversal of this requirement. This individual was allowed to continue as a substitute assistant chief until his retirement.

This decade old grievance and more recent disciplinary incident illustrate that captain seniority is the defining requirement for substitute assistant chief. It has even taken precedence over demonstrated competency problems. On December 31, 2002, the primary substitute assistant chief's on two of the three shifts will retire. The third shift had a similar change one year ago when the senior shift captain decided he no longer wanted to fill-in.

It is not possible to discuss firefighter injury and death statistics without looking at the events on September 11, 2002. On this single day, more firefighters were killed in the line of duty than in the previous 11 years (LeBlanc & Fahy, 2002). The 340-firefighter fatalities in the World Trade Center collapse exceeds career firefighter deaths over the previous 20 years (2002). While the losses from this tragedy are unparalleled, they provide history's most dramatic example of the dangers associated with firefighting and the unpredictability of the fireground. In 2001, 99 additional firefighters lost their

lives. Excluding the trade center fatalities in 2001, the U. S. fire service recorded an average of 100 on-duty deaths each year since 1990 (2002).

“Since 1977, the number of U.S. firefighter deaths annually at structure fires has dropped 59 percent, a finding that often has been credited to improvements in protective clothing, and equipment, fire ground procedures and training” (Fahy, 2002). Due to a drop in the number of structure fires, this reduction is misleading. The actual rate of firefighter deaths in the late 1970’s (5.8 deaths per 100,000) was roughly equal to the rate of firefighter deaths in the late 1990’s (5.7 deaths per 100,000) (2002). With the noted safety improvements, why are firefighters as likely to die today as 30 years ago?

A Duluth fire department assistant chief is responsible for the management, coordination, and direction of all shift activities (DFD Operations Manual, 1988). Without question, the most critical of these general functions are the of duties and responsibilities associate with fireground management. This project explored the importance of fireground management and preparation/training for this function. The research for this project established a clear link between firefighter deaths/injuries and fireground command. The lack of a formal training program for assistant chiefs, coupled with the recent turnover in the substitute position support the potential importance of this study to the health and welfare of Duluth firefighters.

One of the key processes discussed in the *Executive Leadership* course at the National Fire Academy is the ability to manage multiple roles (2000). As the highest-ranking 24-hour employee, a Duluth fire department assistant chief wears many hats. To effectively answer the selected research questions, and ultimately perform in this position, this multi-dimensional understanding is critical.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are hundreds of articles and research projects that address areas related to the functions and responsibilities of a Duluth fire department assistant chief. This review will be divided into two broad areas. The first part of the review focuses on standards applicable to the assistant chief position. The second part of the review looks at literature that describes/discusses the different roles played by an assistant chief and how adequate training supports these roles.

In 1896, the National Fire Protection Organization (NFPA) was organized.

Its purpose is to promote the science and improve the methods of fire protection and prevention, electrical safety and other related safety goals: to obtain and circulate information on these subjects: and to secure the cooperation of its members and the public in establishing proper safeguards against loss of life and property (NFPA, 1998).

During its first 80 years of existence, NFPA focused on fire prevention related codes and standards. In the last 15 years, their focus has expanded to include a wide range of fire department related performance standards. Because NFPA has no government authority, these documents have no direct legal authority. Compliance with these standards is voluntary unless the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) includes language from these standards in their legally enforceable regulations. 26 states, including Minnesota are “OSHA states”. These states incorporated OSHA

regulations into state law. None of the NFPA standards discussed below currently have any legal standing in Minnesota. However, as the National Volunteer Fire Council states:

In establishing the standard of care for rescue operations, the courts will frequently look to the “voluntary” standards issued by NFPA and other organizations. Although “voluntary” in name, these standards can become, in effect, the legally enforceable standard of care in fire and rescue departments. Accordingly, fire and rescue departments should pay close attention to applicable standards (2001, P.1).

Several NFPA standards relate to chief officers. These include:

NFPA 1021: *Fire Officer Professional Qualifications* (1997)

NFPA 1710: *Organization and Deployment of Fire Suppression Operations, Emergency Medical Operations, and Special Operations to the Public by Career Fire Departments* (2001)

NFPA 1201: *Developing Fire Protection Services for the Public* (2000)

NFPA 1500: *Fire Department Occupational Safety and Health Program* (2002).

The purpose of NFPA 1021 is to “specify the minimum job performance requirements for service as a fire officer” (1997, 1.2). This is a progressive standard listing increasing complex requirements for different listed levels of fire officers. The standard breaks this progression down with the terms “Fire Officer I, Fire Officer II, Fire Officer III, and Fire Officer IV. The standard does not correlate these levels to any particular officer position in a fire department. There are programs all over the country

that developed training programs for officers based on the job performance requirement at each level. Each level has performance requirements in:

- a. general fire department knowledge
- b. general fire department skills
- c. human resource management
- d. community and government relations
- e. administration
- f. inspections and investigation
- g. emergency service delivery
- h. safety (NFPA 1201, 2000)

NFPA 1710 is a controversial new performance standard for fire departments. “Its purpose is to specify the minimum criteria addressing the effectiveness and efficiency of the career public fire suppression operations” (p. 4). This standard provides definitions for terms used in this project including incident commander, incident management system, supervisory chief officer, and staff aide. These definitions are listed in the Procedures section of this project.

Key requirements from this standard relating to the Duluth fire department assistant chief’s position include:

- a. required response by a chief officer to all “full-alarm” incidents such as a structure fire (1710, 2001, 5.2.1.2.3)
- b. availability of a staff aide at incidents to help the incident commander maintain control and accountability at scenes (5.2.1.2.5)

- c. a requirement for an **effective** incident management system that is adaptable to different types of incidents that a fire department might be required to respond to (6.2.2)
- d. a training system designed to maintain competency for personnel at all levels of the organization (6.3).

NFPA 1201 is a wide-ranging standard containing requirements on the structure and operations of any organization providing public fire protection. It reinforces the requirements of NFPA 1710 relating to the need for supervisory fire officer response on fire scenes, the need for command aides, and the need for appropriate training. This standard requires NFPA 1021 be used to establish qualifications for fire department officer positions (1201, 7.2.2.2). It states that “ candidates for officer shall meet the requirements for that officer rank for which they have applied in accordance with NFPA 1021” (1201, 2000, 7.4.2). In other words individuals should have appropriate-job specific training before they are considered for promotion to an officer position.

Like NFPA 1021 and 1201, NFPA 1500 details the importance of training and education commensurate with the duties and functions an employee is expected to perform (2002). This standard expands the scope of incident management system (IMS) use from the full alarm response/structure fire to all emergency incidents, drills, and exercises (2002). The use of an IMS during training allows fire personnel to practice and gain familiarization with their system.

Specific demands are placed on incident commanders in Chapter 8 of NFPA 1500. It places responsibility with an incident commander for:

- a. “the overall management of the incident and the safety of all members at the scene” (8.1.5)
- b. establishment of “an organization with sufficient supervisory personnel to control the position and function of all members operating at the scene and to ensure that safety requirements are satisfied” (8.1.7).
- c. a lengthy list of command functions including :
 - arrival on scene prior to command assumption.
 - assumption/confirmation of command and an effective command position.
 - performance of a situation evaluation/risk assessment.
 - initiation, maintenance, and control of incident communications.
 - development of an overall strategy, incident tactical plan, and assignments consistent with standard operating procedures.
 - initiation of an accountability and inventory worksheet.
 - development of an effective incident organization including resource management, effective span of control, direct supervision of the entire incident, designation of supervisors for specific area or functions.
 - reviewing, re-evaluating and revising the incident action plan as needed.
 - continuity, transfer, and termination of command.
 - provision of liaison and coordination with other agencies.

- provision of unified command where needed (8.1.8).

In summary, a chief fire officer should meet job performance requirements demanding a diverse background in management and fire science. In addition, the importance and meaning of an effective incident management/command system and an effective incident commander are stressed repeatedly by NFPA. The standards demand that an incident commander have a support system in place (including a staff aide and assigned functional or geographic managers to accomplish the incident objectives.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has a fire department related standard that is applicable to Minnesota fire departments. This standard, CFR (code of federal regulations) 1910.156 establishes very basic requirements for “the organization, training, and personal protective equipment of fire brigades” (1910.1569[a][1], 1998). While there are no specific references for chief officers, there is training and education language similar to NFPA and relevant to this project. OSHA 1910.156 (c), (1), states:

The employer shall provide training and education for all fire brigade members commensurate with those duties and functions that fire brigade members are expected to perform. Such training and education shall be provided to the fire brigade members before they perform fire brigade emergency activities. Fire brigade leaders and training instructors shall be provided with training and more comprehensive than that provided to the general membership of the fire brigade (1998 p. 2).

Fahy's report *U.S. Fire Service Fatalities in Structure Fires, 1977-2000* reviews trends in firefighter fatalities from the late 1970's to the beginning of the 21st century. She documents marked increases in firefighter deaths due to injuries while operating inside structures (Fahy, 2002). At the conclusion of her report she details basic recommendations for reducing these interior operations fatalities. The importance of personnel accountability programs, danger recognition training, heeding low air alarms, and activating PASS (personal accountability safety system) are stressed (2002).

Anecdotally she questions:

there is growing concern in the fire service related to whether firefighters and fire officers receive the degree of training and experience necessary to properly assess the risks on the fire ground. If the number of structure fires is decreasing, how in fact do firefighters and fire officers gain the experience to understand fire progression, fire behavior, and what happens to the structural integrity of a building under fire conditions (pp. 3-4)?

This review of literature has exclusively focused on standards and regulations that help provide a foundation for the analysis, results, recommendations and discussion about the questions raised in this project. An extensive review of applicable fire related material exists related to chief fire officer and incident command/commander related issues.

PROCEDURES

The purpose of this research project was to determine performance needs for Duluth Fire Department substitute assistant chiefs. Though descriptive research

methodology several questions related to this purpose were analyzed and answered.

Recommendations for future action were made based on the answers to these questions.

A literature review is not a research procedure. However, the standards review that comprised the literature review for this project provided the foundation for the additional analysis. Built upon the foundation of the review, three additional steps or procedures were used for data collection.

First, information was collected from the City of Duluth and the Duluth Fire Department to specifically define the role of an assistant chief and why the department fills substitute openings based on seniority.

Second, the scope of the substitute issue was explored. Data was collected on responses made by assistant chiefs and the number of days substitutes worked.

Finally, comprehensive interviews were held with the regular assistant chiefs, the senior substitute assistant chief's on each shift, the fire chief, deputy fire chief, fire marshal/lead fire investigator, and the rescue squad captain from each shift. The rationale and interview questions are detailed below.

A. Assistant Chiefs: this group provided perspective on how substitutes are trained, the adequacy of training, critical substitute tasks, and suggested improvements. These two interviews were approximately 1 hour long. The third assistant chief is the author of this project and his comments were reserved for the discussion section of this project.

Questions:

1. How long have you been an assistant chief?
2. How long were you a fire captain before your promotion?
3. Did you ever "fill-in" as an assistant chief before your promotion?

4. How many different individuals have you has as a fill-in since your promotion to assistant chief?
5. Did/does the Duluth Fire Department (DFD) help prepare these individuals to fill-in?
6. What do you do to prepare these individuals to fill-in?
7. How mush time have you spent to prepare these people?
8. Did any of your fill-ins have an opportunity to work with you prior to “going it alone”?
9. Do you feel we adequately prepare our fill-ins?
10. What should the DFD do to improve our fill-in capabilities?
11. What should the DFD do to improve fill-in capabilities?
12. Is there a difference in DFD operations on your shift when you are gone? Explain..
13. Do you expect your fill-in to do everything you normally do? Explain, be specific...
14. What are the 3 most important things for a fill-in to know?
15. What would make you a better assistant chief?
16. Are shift operations relatively consistent?
17. What is the role of an assistant chief on the Duluth Fire Department?
18. What is your most important function?
19. How would you like to change our assistant chief fill-in program?
20. What must an assistant chief be most familiar with from the DFD operations manual?

B. Substitute: this group provided perspective on their preparation, adequacy, and suggestions for improvements and role differential with regular assistant chiefs. The interviews lasted 1 hour.

Questions:

1. How long have you worked for the DFD?
2. How long have you been a fire captain?
3. Approximately how many days have our filled in on Squad 251 (assistant chief)?
4. What do you like best/least about the experience
5. Do you feel “comfortable” when you fill-in? What makes you feel this way?
6. What type of training/experience have you received for the duties of an assistant fire chief?
7. What other training/experience helps you most do the job?
8. In your opinion, is there an operational difference when the regular assistant chief is gone?
9. What should the assistant chief do to help you do the job better?
10. What should the DFD do to improve/enhance the role of fill-in’s and regular assistant chiefs in terms of training?

11. What are the 3 most important duties of a fill-in assistant chief?
12. Are there differences in the role of a fill-in and a regular assistant chief? In other words, are there things a regular assistant chief should handle that a fill-in should not?
13. What would you like to see the DFD do to improve/enhance your ability to fill-in as an assistant chief? How about regular assistant chiefs?

C. Deputy Chief: this individual provided a unique perspective as the immediate supervisor of the assistant chiefs and a former assistant chief. In addition to the same expectations in responses as the regular and substitutes, supervisory expectations were explored. This interview was 1 hour long.

Questions:

1. What is the role of an assistant chief in the Duluth Fire Department?
2. What are the 3 most important functions of a DFD assistant chief?
3. What would you like to see the assistant chiefs focus on in terms of improving operations?
4. Does the DFD have clear/articulated expectations for the assistant chiefs?
5. How do you evaluate if the assistant chief job is being performed satisfactorily?
6. What type of training should assistant chiefs pursue to better their capability to perform in their position?
7. Should the DFD provide training for the assistant chiefs? What would you like to see provided?
8. What should the assistant chiefs do to help you do your job better/support/improve DFD operations?
9. Do you feel we adequately prepare the fill-in assistant chiefs? Explain..
10. What should the assistant chiefs do to better prepare the fill-in assistant chiefs?
11. What should the DFD do to better prepare employees for this role?
12. Are there duties performed by regular assistant chiefs that should not be performed by fill-ins?
13. In your opinion, is there an operational difference when the regular assistant chief is gone?
14. Philosophically speaking, should we fill-in the assistant chief position differently? How?
15. Is it important for a fill-in to spend time with the regular assistant chief? How much?

16. What parts of the DFD operations manual must a fill-in assistant chief be most familiar?
17. How consistent are operations between the shifts?
18. Should the assistant chief role change? If so, how?

D. Fire Chief: The perspective of the department director was critical. How does the present approach to utilizing substitute assistant chiefs meet his expectations? What are areas of concern? What improvements should be made and by whom?

Questions:

The same questions were asked of the fire chief as the deputy chief.

E. Rescue Captains: These senior captains respond out of the same station as the assistant chiefs. They respond on every fire alarm with the assistant chief. The assistant chief works more closely with these Captains on each shift than any other member of the fire department. They are 3 seasoned, senior Captains. Their short interview focused on any differences they note when the regular assistant chief is off-duty. In addition, they were asked if they feel their role changes when a substitute assistant chief is on duty.

Questions:

1. Is there a difference during fireground operations with an assistant chief? What are the differences you note?
2. Do you feel your fire scene role changes with a fill-in assistant chief?

F. Fire Marshal: Presently, the fire marshal is also the lead fire investigator. This short interview focused on any noted differences on fire call outs

and scene preservation when substitute assistant chiefs are working.

Questions:

1. From the perspective of a fire investigator, what differences do you not when there is a fill-in assistant chief? Specifically, are you more/less likely to be called? DO you note any scene preservation differences?

Study Limitations

This study was designed to focus specifically on the role of fill-in or substitute assistant chief on the Duluth Fire Department. While not the focus of the study, some recommendations were made that are also applicable to regular assistant. This will be noted with the recommendation.

Definitions:

Incident Commander: The fire department member in overall command of an emergency incident (NFPA 1710,2001 Sec 3.3.22).

Incident Management System: An organized system of roles, responsibilities, and standard operating procedures used to manage emergency operations (NFPA 1710, 2001 Sec3.3.23)

Job Performance Requirements: A statement that describes a specific job task, lists the items necessary to complete the task and defines measurable or observable outcomes and evaluation areas for the specific task.

Personal Accountability Safety Systems: A device worn by firefighters that alarm when manually activated or when there is a lack of movement by the firefighter---usually called a PASS device.

Span of Control: The number of employees, tasks/functions supervised by a manager without losing the ability to effectively manage.

Staff Aide: A firefighter or fire officer assigned to a supervisory chief officer to assist with the logistical, tactical, and accountability functions of incident, division, or sector command (NFPA 1710, 2001, Sec 3.3.37).

Substitute Assistant Chief: The senior shift captain on the Duluth fire department who works in place of an assistant fire chief during any absences. Also called a **fill-in** assistant chief.

Supervisory Chief Officer: A member whose responsibility is to assume command through a formalized transfer process and to allow company officers to directly supervise personnel assigned to the them (NFPA 1710, 2001, Sec. 3.3.30.2)

RESULTS

This study was framed around concerns about the process, preparation, and training of Duluth fire captains filling the role of assistant fire chief. Several initial research questions framed by a literature review, some basic data collection, and several selective interviews provided the results for the project.

Appendix A lists the knowledge, skills and abilities required prior to appointment as a Duluth Fire Department assistant chief. This 2000 job posting summarizes the duties of the position with a single sentence, “to direct and supervise fire operations”.

Minimum qualifications include thorough knowledge of a broad body of fire related material. Knowledge of effective management and supervisory practices is required. Applicants for the position are required to have communication skills, crisis management skills, and subordinate supervision skills. They must have an ability to develop effective work relationships and use good judgement under crisis conditions (Appendix A).

Appendix B is copied from the Duluth fire department Operations Manual. It provides a detailed description of the assistant fire chief's job, his/her position in the hierarchy of the organization and a summary of duties and responsibilities. The words "manage", "supervise", "coordinate" and "command" summarizes the position information.

The material found in Appendices A and B illustrate the demanding nature of the assistant fire chief position. It is a position requiring extensive fire experience and training. More than 20 fire captains competed for the single opening in 2000. A written exam based on a long list of fire and management related texts, department and city policy manuals started the selection process. The top 10 applicants from the written were invited to participate in an oral performance exam. This exam involved fire and management related questions, an assessment of policy/procedure knowledge, and mock command of a fire scenario exploring tactical and strategic decision making. One fire captain was promoted as a result of this process. It is possible there will not be another opening for a decade depending on the timing and selection of the next fire chief and deputy fire chief.

Between January, 2001 and October, 2002, the 3 assistant fire chiefs responded to 1777 calls. This is approximately 81 calls per month. Monthly responses ranged from 60

to 117. The majority of the responses were to multi-unit fire alarms. The Duluth fire department averages 150 to 175 responses each year to structure fires. Most of these are room and contents fire in single family or small multi-family dwellings. There are 1 to 3 significant commercial occupancy fires each year (Duluth Fire Department, 2002).

In the same 22-month period averaging 81 responses, the regular assistant chiefs were absent 114 days due to vacation, sick leave, and special duty. These absences were fairly even across the shifts. The 5-day per month average means that a fill-in assistant chief was on duty 17% of all days worked in the period. A significant number of work shifts are covered by fill-in assistant chiefs (Duluth Fire Department, 2002).

Appendix C provides detailed responses to all the interview questions asked to the 13 study participants. The regular assistant chiefs interviewed have 2 ½ and 4 years in the position. They served as fire captains for 14 and 9 years respectively prior to their promotions. Neither had any significant experience as an assistant chief prior to promotion.

They were asked a series of 20 questions designed to help answer the research questions. These questions are listed in the **Procedures** section of this project and in Appendix C. Their responses are summarized below:

- The Duluth Fire Department does not provide any targeted training for assistant chiefs or substitute assistant chiefs.
- Assistant chiefs spend 2-3 hours preparing new substitute's for their assignment. Most of this time is spent reviewing office duties.
- There was no "ride along" time for substitute's with the regular assistant chiefs.

- There is agreement that preparation for substitute's is inadequate.
- The most important duty of the assistant chief position is managing people in the station and at the emergency scene.
- Substitute assistant chiefs are not expected to perform all the duties of regular assistant chiefs. Certain office duties and personnel issues are best left for the regular assistant.
- There is a feeling that fireground operations might not be as structured when a substitute assistant chief is on duty.
- Substitute assistant chiefs must clearly understand the "people" related written operations sections in the fire department procedure manuals. This would include emergency response procedures, incident command, the labor agreement, and personnel policies.

Five substitute assistant chiefs were asked a series of 13 questions. The 14 to 22 year captains have worked for the fire department between 20 and 30 years.

Three have 40 or more days filling-in as an assistant chief. Their responses are summarized below and detailed in Appendix C.

- They enjoy the challenge of the position.
- They worry about encountering situations or problems without adequate preparation.
- Experience in the position increases personal levels of comfort.
- There has been little or no formal training for the position.

- They feel their years of experience as fire captains have best prepared them for the substitute duties.
- They have a variety of ideas about how regular assistant chiefs could enhance their ability as substitutes (orientation manual, periodic reviews/updates, “cheat sheets”).
- They believe their role as substitute does not include all duties of a regular assistant chief (discipline, scheduling).
- They believe the fire department should enhance training for regular and substitute assistant chiefs but are unclear on specifics.
- Firefighter safety and effective emergency scene command are the most important duties of a substitute assistant chief.
- All of them believe that opportunities to function in the assistant chief position provide the best opportunity to learn the position.

The fire chief and deputy fire chief were asked a series of 18 questions. These questions related to their perspective of the assistant chief role on the Duluth fire department. Questions solicited opinions on how the assistant chief’s office is managed today by the regular and substitute employees. They were asked to describe any changes or improvements they would like to see for the assistant chief fill-in program. Their responses are summarized below.

- A summary statement of the assistant chief role would be “to run the daily operations of the Duluth fire department both on the business and emergency side”.

- The most important functions of assistant chiefs relate specifically to incident management.
- They both see a need for incident command training to improve fire scene operations and improve the capability of assistant chiefs to perform their job..
- They agree that the fire department has not established clear expectation for the assistant chiefs both regular and substitute.
- There is no formal mechanism for assistant chief job evaluation.
- It is important for the assistant chiefs to be an information conduit from and to the chief and deputy chief.
- There is a difference of opinion on adequacy of substitute assistant chief training. The fire chief believes it is adequate but could be improved. The deputy fire chief (who formerly served as an assistant chief) believes that the preparation is wholly inadequate.
- The fire department should have a structured program to better prepare employees for officer positions.
- Philosophically, both would like to see some sort of testing process to select substitute assistant chiefs.
- Both note relatively minor operational differences when a regular assistant chief is off duty.
- Both would like to see substitute assistant chiefs spend time (not clearly defined amount) with the regular assistant chief as part of their orientation to the position.

- Both are satisfied with the present role of the regular and substitute assistant chiefs.

Duluth fire department rescue squad captains were asked if they notice significant differences in fire scenes when their regular assistant chiefs are gone. Of course, when you work with a specific individual most of the time, there will be differences when a change occurs. The question and discussion focused on significant operational issues. Two significant findings were made.

- The rescue squad captains see less scene direction with substitute assistant chiefs. There is a need for more individual decision.
- The rescue squad captains feel an obligation to support the substitute assistant chiefs. This support ranges from helping get to unfamiliar location and alarm panels to more oversight of personnel on the fire scene.

Substitute assistant chief's call out our lead fire investigator more frequently (Appendix C). This is most likely due to fire investigation experience. The investigator often finds better scene preservation when regular assistant chiefs are on duty. He attributes this to tighter fireground management.

Research Questions

1. What are the critical tasks performed by a Duluth fire department assistant chief?

There are many critical tasks noted in the Duluth fire assistant chief job announcement (Appendix A), position description (Appendix B), and interviews (Appendix C). These critical tasks include all facets of a fire department's operations division management. It is the obligation of assistant fire chiefs to assume

responsibilities for all facets of the business and emergency sides of fire operations.

Almost any neglected task could have a significant operational impact over the course of time. The critical sub-question to be answered is: “What are the critical tasks that must be performed by a substitute assistant chief?”

Managing the emergency incident scene is the most critical task performed by a Duluth fire department assistant chief. For a substitute, it is the only truly significant critical task. There is nothing else in the job description of assistant chief that has potential for loss of firefighter/civilian life and significant damage to property other than decisions made at an incident scene. These decisions begin at dispatch and continue until all units are back in quarters.

2. What deficiencies exist in the training/preparation for substitute assistant chiefs?

With the exception of 2 to 3 hours of review of routine office procedures, there is no formal training for substitute assistant chiefs. If the critical tasks performed by the substitute focus on emergency scene management, the critical deficiency is training/preparation in this area.

3. Specifically, what should be the focus of improving the status quo?

All the key players (assistant chiefs, substitutes, fire chief, deputy fire chief, key captains, fire investigator) recognize some degree of deficiency exists when a substitute assistant chief is on duty. While excellent employees, doing an excellent job, the substitutes have no recent incident management training. The same is true of the regular assistant chiefs. They also need to be training. The key difference is the experience of scene command gained by the full-time experience vs. the relatively few days a year for substitutes. So the status quo should be improved through an

aggressive, comprehensive incident management-training program. This program is not only need by substitute assistant chiefs but by all embers working in operations. They all have a critical role in making the system work. The assistant chief is the key role in the system because he/she puts the structure together and makes the key strategic decisions.

4. What roles do each of the following play in improvement efforts?

a. assistant chiefs

The assistant chiefs can do many things to help move the fire department toward a comprehensive incident management-training program. As the group that had to learn command mostly by on-the job practice, they understand the problem substitutes are most likely to encounter. They can continue building the “cheat sheet” to help the substitutes with thee routine information often taken for granted by someone doing the job everyday. They can schedule time with the substitutes when personnel levels allow it. They can lead by example and demonstrate safe, tight fireground scene management.

b. training office/officer

The role of the training officer is to assess the training needs of the fire department, prioritize these needs and develop programs to meet established priorities. Based on his evaluation of the material from this project, the training officer, working through the deputy fire chief and in consultation with the assistant chief should research the most appropriate incident management training materials/programs available. In addition,

fire critiques could begin to provide an opportunity to focus on incident management strategies. The literature found references for this project is illustrative of the voluminous material available relating to incident command training.

c. fire administration

The fire chief and deputy fire chief recognize deficiencies in the assistant chief fill-in process. A commitment to focus training on incident management is the key administrative role in an improvement process.

In summary, all of this project results lead down a path toward a comprehensive incident command/incident management-training program.

DISCUSSION

“I have one job and that is to ensure those who serve under me go home after a shift”(Smith, 2002, p. 29). Michael Smith, District of Columbia Chief of Suppression, spoke these words. Chief Smith’s quote points to the ultimate purpose of any improvements efforts in fire suppression operations management. Potential problems with an emergency scene incident management system can be fatal. In the summer of 2001, a firefighter died while operating at a structure fire somewhere in this country. OSHA issued several citations as a result of their post-fatality investigation. Two of the most serious violations were a lack of supervision by an incident commander and interior operations losing contact with outside operations i.e. the incident commander or his designee (Goldfeder, 2000). A 1994 document published by the National Institute of

Occupational Health and Safety (NIOSH) after a double firefighter fatality investigation again reinforced the importance of

establishing and implementing an incident management system with written standard operating procedures for all firefighters. The system shall provide for the following :

- a. a well coordinated approach to the emergency
- b. accountability of all firefighters
- c. overall safety of all firefighters at the emergency scene. (NIOSH, 1994, p. 2).

Turn the page to another NIOSH firefighter fatality investigation in 2001 and the same recommendation is at the top of the list. The fire service literature, especially post-fire fatality investigations repeatedly demonstrate the consequences of ineffective incident management.

So who is going to take care of the troops? Who is going to be the experienced and seasoned leader at these fires to command the operation? Who is going to lead and show by example, the firefighters what to do (and not do) during training? Who is going to make firefighters and officers train constantly on structural firefighting operations and tactics, fire command, scene supervision, building construction, structural collapse, venting, communications, and all of the related and required tasks because the incident commander knows what can happen if they don't take the training seriously? (Goldfeder, 2000, p.1)

This quote eloquently summarizes the heart of the assistant chief's job with the Duluth fire department. It defines the scope of an effective incident management system that exceeds simply fireground command but the role and knowledge all the participants at a fire scene must have for safe operations.

A clear case has been made for the importance of incident management and the importance of focusing substitute assistant chief preparation on incident management. What issues are most important in defining these efforts?

The literature review for this project was the starting point for the better preparation of substitute assistant chiefs. These standards repeatedly stress the need for job-specific training and education. NFPA 1500, describes the long list of command related responsibilities for the person in-charge of the emergency scene. Research for this project found dozens of recent reports and articles related to developing and improving incident management. One of the key concepts relating to the early stages of incident management development is "span of control."

"One of the surest sources of delay and confusion is to allow any superior to be directly responsible for the control of too many subordinates" (Nickols, 2000, p. 1). This span of control concept is very important to the incident commander. Losing span of control means that too many thing and/or people become the responsibility of too few people. The end result is an unorganized emergency scene. The consequences can range from ineffective suppression efforts to the injury and death of civilians and firefighters. Most experts recommend an emergency scene span of control ranging from 3 to 5 people (Los Angeles Fire Department, 1998). Command aides and crew resources management concepts help the incident commander combat span of control related problems.

NFPA 1710, defines a staff aide as “a firefighter or fire officer assigned to a supervisory chief officer to assist with the logistical, tactical, and accountability functions of incident, division, or sector command” (3.3.37, p. 1710-6). Section 5.6.3 of NFPA 1201, states that “provisions shall be made for chief officers to designate aides for supporting managing an incident”(p. 1201-7). Phoenix fire staffs the command aide position with a fire captain planning on testing for a command level position in their fire department. This command aide is called a Fire Incident Technician or FIT. His/her job is to:

- a. handle all the radio protocols and messages for the incident commander
- b. get only decisions from the incident commander and make the necessary transmissions to accomplish their decisions.
- c. keep the incident commander appraised of information being given and received on the scene
- d. sometimes track accountability (Phelps, 2002, p. 2).

Without a FIT, it is no wonder that many chiefs feel overwhelmed by significant incidents. Because of the radio, they are married to on multiple-alarm incidents, there is little precious time to gather information, think through a problem, and make effective decisions (Phelps, 2002, p. 2).

Fireground span of control and command aide concepts are examples of the many issues relating to an effective IMS that must be addressed. The Duluth fire department needs to do a much better job preparing its officers, including substitute assistant chiefs for fireground command functions. Five years ago, the author of this project found

himself newly promoted to the position of assistant fire chief. Though he studied the written test resources materials diligently and prepared as well as possible for the oral performance exam, most of the job was “learned by doing.” The author was fortunate to have senior assistant chiefs still in the office when promoted. These individuals were an invaluable source of help. One of the senior assistant’s was a role model for how to do the job right. Still, there was no formal training program.

It must be noted that the substitute assistant chiefs presently do an excellent job. The opportunities to command a fire, especially a complex incident are not commonplace. The author’s primary substitute recently commanded his first fire after a dozen 24-hour shifts in the role. All the assistant chiefs, regular and substitute, need training to develop and enhance fire scene management skills. A proactive approach to this issue will reduce the chance for a fireground injury or death. It is hoped that this project will move this issue to the top of a long list of department needs. This project complements the revisions to the department’s accountability policy, its development of rapid intervention team training, and enhanced response to fires projects already under way.

RECOMMENDATIONS

“Most organizations will spend 18, 24 or more weeks with recruits. Why do we fail to provide the necessary education to new company officers when they are promoted? (Sargent, 2002, p.48) With chief fire officers this question is even more appropriate. Specifically, the Duluth Fire Department needs to:

1. Use the NFPA professional fire officer qualifications to develop a comprehensive training program for company officers and assistant chiefs. The priority is incident management training.
2. Use the Duluth Fire Department incident command policy to facilitate a new part of post-fire critiques. Review adherence to the incident command principles as part of the critique. This reinforces incident command principles and serves as excellent supplemental training.
3. Use media footage, digital photography, and computer simulations to facilitate tactics and strategy review sessions for all members of the department. Assistant chiefs and substitute assistant chiefs should focus on strategic considerations during this training.
4. Develop a mentoring program for substitute assistant chiefs. Utilize the experience of the regular assistant chiefs to support the substitute's development. There are often days when personnel allocations would allow the department to have substitute's spend time with the assistant chiefs.

It is easy for anyone working in a new position to focus on tasks immediately in front of them. In other words, someone working as a substitute assistant chief worries about doing reports, handling sick leave, answering the constantly ringing phone, and managing payroll. He/she will often get through an entire 24-hour shift without having to command a complex fire scene. Organizationally, a critical evaluation of what's really important needs to take place. It is potentially too late when an ill-prepared person is confronted with life and death decisions and makes the wrong one.

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APPENDIX A

Duluth Fire Department Job Announcement (January 7, 2000)

DUTIES: To direct and supervise fire operations

MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS:

1. Education and Experience
 - A. Five years experience as a Fire Captain, Deputy Fire Marshal, or Fire Marshal with the City of Duluth Fire Department.
2. License Requirement
 - A. Possession of a valid Minnesota Class C driver's license or privilege by date of appointment and thereafter.
3. Knowledge
 - A. Thorough knowledge of fire prevention, control, suppression, and hazardous materials technician level abatement methods.
 - B. Thorough knowledge of the operations and maintenance of firefighting apparatus, equipment, and tools.
 - C. Thorough knowledge of all pertinent national, state and local codes, statutes, ordinances, and laws, as they relate to fire prevention and fire suppression.
 - D. Thorough knowledge of the City of Duluth and Fire Department's policies, procedures, and guidelines.
 - E. Thorough knowledge of the properties and reactions of common and uncommon chemicals and products.
 - F. Knowledge of general physics, hydraulics, and technical math as they relate to firefighting.
 - G. Knowledge of effective management and supervisory practices.
 - H. Thorough knowledge of applicable traffic laws and regulations.
4. Skills
 - A. Skill in communicating on a one-on-one basis and before groups for the purpose of obtaining or providing information.
 - B. Skill in rapidly analyzing and determining appropriate action in crisis situations.
 - C. Skill in reading and interpreting complex technical and legal materials.
 - D. Skill in gathering and analyzing data.
 - E. Skill in supervising subordinate personnel.
 - F. Skill in public and media relations.

5. Abilities
 - A. Ability to develop and maintain effective working relationships with co-workers, administrators, employees, media representatives, and the general public.
 - B. Ability to maintain required certifications.
 - C. Ability to perform all tasks, which require use of a self-contained breathing apparatus as, recommended by ANSI Z88.5-1981 and required by OSHA 1910.134.
 - D. Ability to physically perform all duties which may be assigned during emergencies, as required by OSHA 1910.156.
 - E. Ability to be courageous and careful, and to use good judgment in crisis and life-threatening situations.

6. Other Requirements
 - A. Must pass periodic medical examinations to verify the ability to physically perform all duties, which may be assigned during emergencies, including tasks requiring the use of self-contained breathing apparatus.
 - B. Must possess natural or corrective vision of at least 20/20 in one eye and 20/30 in the other.
 - C. Must possess normal hearing when tested according to ANSI 1969 Standards.
 - D. Must not use, by smoking, ingestion, or otherwise, any tobacco products.

(All the above listed requirements are necessary on the first day of employment)

SELECTION PROCESS:	Examination Process	Weight	Pass
Phase I:	Written	45%	70%
Phase II	Oral Performance	45%	70%
Phase III	Seniority	10%	

APPENDIX B

Duluth Fire Department Operations Manual Position Description (June, 1988)

Operations Manual Book No. 1. Organization
Chapter III, Subject 3, Code 1-III-3

3.07 Fire Assistant Chief (Fire Suppression)

- A. Description: The Fire Assistant Chiefs who are assigned to twenty-four hour shift duty at Headquarters are known as Shift Commanders. Each one is in charge of one of the 3 shifts of fire suppression personnel. They manage, coordinate, and direct their particular shifts' activities which may include fire prevention, pre-fire planning, fire control, rescue, emergency medical aid, public assistance, public education, training, apparatus and equipment maintenance, fire department facility maintenance, and supply. IN addition, each shift commander is given certain administrative responsibilities within the scope of the Operations Division.
- B. Position: The shift commanders are directly responsible to the Chief and Deputy Chief. They directly supervise the company commanders of their respective shifts. Each shift is composed of a number of fire companies.
- C. Duties and Responsibilities:
 - 1. Manages, coordinates, and directs all operations and activities of the shift through subordinate officers.
 - 2. Responds to emergencies and serves as incident commander under ICS and Operations manual guidelines.
 - 3. Coordinates and manages routine shift operations including shift training, fire prevention, fire investigation, pre-fire planning, public education, public relations, maintenance, and supply.
 - 4. Handles administrative assignments in accordance with those parameters that have been established by the operations chief.
 - 5. Manages shift personnel matters by coordinating with company commanders and operating within the parameters of departmental guidelines.
 - 6. Takes an active interest in overall administration of the fire department.
 - 7. Provides clear and concise direction to his subordinate personnel with leadership that will allow them to perform effectively in their duties.
 - 8. Acts as chief in the absence of the chief and deputy chief.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Assistant Chief Interviews: (2 interviews)

Questions:

1. How long have you been an assistant chief?
 - 2 ½ years
 - 4 years
2. How long were you a fire captain before your promotion?
 - 14 years
 - 9 years
3. Did you ever “fill-in” as an assistant chief before your promotion?
 - Once
 - Once
4. How many different individuals have you has as a fill-in since your promotion to assistant chief?
 - 6
 - 6
5. Did/does the Duluth Fire Department (DFD) help prepare these individuals to fill-in?
 - No
 - Yes, some incident command training years ago, some management training that wasn’t particularly helpful, basic fire training but no targeted training that I remember
6. What do you do to prepare these individuals to fill-in?
 - bring them to Headquarters and go over duties, daily responsibilities, computer basics
 - Bring them down, walk through typical daily duties, review assistant chief checklist, give an overview of expectations—make sure they understand that they are ultimately responsible for everything, they need to pay attention. “you are running the show—must be aware”
7. How mush time have you spent to prepare these people?
 - 2 hours to review basics
 - 2-3 hours a couple of days prior to their fill-in assignment
8. Did any of your fill-ins have an opportunity to work with you prior to “going it alone”?
 - No
 - No – the manpower is not available
9. Do you feel we adequately prepare our fill-ins?
 - marginal – individual dependent – some basics assume they know – unfortunately not as clear as expected
 - No – classes through training office or incident command, managing people, other duties/responsibilities – more formalized structure

10. What should the DFD do to improve our fill-in capabilities?
 - better – follow up for errors, review operations
 - demand more proactive administrative action concerning the issue, expand on our training regiment for fill-ins
11. What should the DFD do to improve fill-in capabilities?
 - tough to do, training involves so few people because so few have an opportunity to fill-in, could target training to a larger department audience – incident command, radio procedures, fireground organization, teamwork...so that when you come in you have a solid foundation
 - training program to prepare captains for the position, require testing to show knowledge of duties/responsibilities, provide study materials
12. Is there a difference in DFD operations on your shift when you are gone? Explain..
 - For the most part no, I suspect that some fill-ins might have trouble controlling fireground operations—they don't have the scene working relationship that I have
 - Yes, a lot more freelancing rather than a coordinated approach, don't receive as much direction from the fill-in, a looser attitude in general
13. Do you expect your fill-in to do everything you normally do? Explain, be specific...
 - No, schedule, personnel matters
 - No, vacation picks, delicate issues like personnel, get information and relay to me
14. What are the 3 most important things for a fill-in to know?
 - a. how to manage personnel-most important (staffing issues), b. how to access resources like call fire investigator, staff call-out, c. overall awareness of everything going on – get involved as necessary – can't afford to "zone out"
 - a. proper command, b. dealing with employee relations problems, c. dealing with our customers-the public
15. What would make you a better assistant chief?
 - better communication between the 3 assistant chiefs to help improve consistency
 - more opportunities to train in-depth with incident command, hands on, National Fire Academy, outside training
16. Are shift operations relatively consistent?
 - very important-essential to know what other shifts are doing, we need to get together more and continue between shift briefings
 - pretty good lately, mostly minor issues that are inconsistent, might be some fire scene inconsistency because we haven't had formal training so its left to individuals
17. What is the role of an assistant chief on the Duluth Fire Department?
 - managing people – fire scene and routine operations, the toughest ,most draining is dealing with personnel issues
 - coordination of shift activities, command of scenes, handling manpower issues, support the needs of fire companies, linking companies and the

administration, keeping consistency, discipline, commendation, keeping day-to-day suppression forces going

18. What is your most important function?
 - managing personnel problems – can affect a person's life
 - safety of the firefighters
19. How would you like to change our assistant chief fill-in program?
 - track the routine problems we find when there is a fill-in and be sure to training in those areas – computer-scheduler...
 - more training/testing – we tested to make sure we had knowledge – fill-ins should have some degree of assessment
20. What must an assistant chief be most familiar with from the DFD operations? manual?
 - labor agreements, emergency operations manual, incident command concepts, where to find information
 - emergency scene operations, injury reports, personnel policies, disciplinary issues

Substitute Assistant Chiefs Interviews: (5 interviews)

Questions:

1. How long have you worked for the DFD?
 - 30 years
 - 19 ½ years
 - 26 years
 - 24 years
 - 24 years
2. How long have you been a fire captain?
 - 22 years
 - 14 years
 - 15 years
 - 15 years
 - 16 years
3. Approximately how many days have our filled in on Squad 251 (assistant chief)?
 - 30-40 days
 - 9 days
 - 40 days
 - 2 days
 - 60 days
4. What do you like best/least about the experience?

Best:

 - new environment, challenge of something different
 - being the decision maker, get the full picture-make your best call
 - money
 - challenge of something new

- challenge of a different job, coordination of multiple companies
- Least:
- no answers available, nobody to go to especially on weekends, no preparation
 - a little apprehension about the unknown, something coming up unprepared for – “What that would be, I don’t know
 - petty tasks – phone, schedule changes, trades, unable to relax
 - computer work
 - not feeling I have enough knowledge/experience, worrying something will come up that I’m not prepared for
5. Do you feel “comfortable” when you fill-in? What makes you feel this way?
 - yes – the number of times doing it – experience
 - yes – been around long enough, confident in the abilities of those I work with
 - yes – familiarity with the position, self-confidence due to familiarity
 - yes – real world experience handling emergencies
 - yes – worked at headquarters a long time – saw assistant chief in action, found out info by osmosis
 6. What type of training/experience have you received for the duties of an assistant fire chief?
 - how to access the computer-nothing else on the job, I have had national Fire Academy training for company officer and incident command that was helpful
 - incident command stuff has helped over the years, reading for past assistant chief tests, fill-in information could be done better
 - preparing for assistant chief exams twice, on the job training with the current assistant chief, trial and error on office duties
 - working with the regular assistant chief
 - very little-a couple of hours on CAD, scheduler, who to call when...
 7. What other training/experience helps you most do the job?
 - company officer training at the national Fire Academy
 - general fire department training, aware of my own and others capabilities and knowledge base
 - my tenure at the DFD “day to day experience”. “experience managing resources”
 - years as a fire captain
 - on the job functioning as a fire captain
 8. In your opinion, is there an operational difference when the regular assistant chief is gone?
 - yes – a big difference dealing with problems/troubles not able to do the follow-up because back in normal position
 - don’t think there is, could be but not aware of it
 - yes – regular assistant has more supervisory experience, and I have more operational experience, more comfortable doing than telling, getting better with experience
 - yes – experience with day-to-day stuff – repetition

- yes – or at least the potential, hard to be specific, at an alarm – fill-in does things differently – luckily people are there to help you, the more you do it – the better it gets but early on it was easy to forget things like PAR reports, group page... things I was told about but rarely had a need to use
9. What should the assistant chief do to help you do the job better?
 - a list or manual in a set place of expectations, computer information, call-out information, each assistant does things differently, no one place to go for information, should be regularly updated, possibly kept as a computer file, firmly believe there should be a fourth assistant chief to improve consistency
 - every once in a while being brought up to stuff on issues the regular assistant chiefs are privy to, help keep current on job issues/changes
 - good communication and support exist now, others are very helpful, not sure what could be done by assistant chiefs to help prepare better
 - personal training a couple times a year
 - assistant chief cheat sheets have helped, should accumulate helpful information, nothing glaring, it is a matter of experience
 10. What should the DFD do to improve/enhance the role of fill-in's and regular assistant chiefs in terms of training?
 - develop a training policy/procedure, most important is office stuff and where to get resources..who do I call... how long to get it...?
 - not real sure, have suggested reading, performance model/expectations
 - ability to listen to comments, be open minded on scenes, sensitive to the thoughts and ideas of personnel rather than authoritarian point of view
 - officer/manager training like taught by G.P., relating to others, moderating a meeting...
 - some way to write down things that will come up and how to handle them, specific guidebook "things to remember", "how to handle"
 11. What are the 3 most important duties of a fill-in assistant chief?
 - protect life and property, ability to listen, discipline maintenance in station and on scene
 - nobody get hurt, minimize loss of property, manage day-to-day activities
 - personal safety, day-to-day management issues, prevention of chaos
 - managing the emergency scene, take care of manpower, day-to-day issues/questions
 - incident command, routine operations, handling problems with stations/personnel
 12. Are there differences in the role of a fill-in and a regular assistant chief? In other words, are there things a regular assistant chief should handle that a fill-in should not?
 - yes – discipline issues, news media relations – have had no training on how much information to release
 - yes – plenty of thing I don't know due to lack of experience
 - yes – long term things like discipline need to be passed off to regular assistant chief, long-term projects

- yes – depends on what the fill-in is trained to do, personnel decisions and discipline are examples
 - yes – scheduling vacations, serious personnel problems, sick leave, financial related issues
13. What would you like to see the DFD do to improve/enhance you ability to fill-in as an assistant chief? How about regular assistant chiefs?
- training, staff officer training, tabletop command training, clear expectations, “training is the key but it is tile consuming and expensive”
 - critiques on performance, discuss how things were handled, assistant chiefs get together to discuss how things were handled, more of the “one fire department concept
 - unsure of what you don’t know, need to evaluate deficiencies
 - more opportunities to do the job, more familiarity with duties
 - more written information, more time in close proximity to the job, pay close attention to command role/responsibilities at fire scenes, follow the regular assistant chief around and not have to worry about regular job – not be told but witness

Fire Chief/Deputy Fire Chief Interviews: (2 interviews)

Questions:

1. What is the role of an assistant chief in the Duluth Fire Department?
 - represent the fire department in the city when the chief and deputy are unavailable 24/7, manage/organize operations division of the fire department, act as incident commander with associated duties/responsibilities
 - run the daily operations of the Duluth Fire Department both on the business and emergency side
2. What are the 3 most important functions of a DFD assistant chief?
 - insure proper resources to accomplish goals with trained/capable people to respond, manage incidents to accomplish goals, provide for safety of citizens and firefighters
 - to act as incident commander, to provide leadership for all fire operations personnel, to provide organizational leadership for operations
3. What would you like to like to see the assistant chiefs focus on in terms of improving operations?
 - insure principles of incident command are established on scenes, insure safety of firefighters and accomplish the mission
 - issue of “command” needs to be strengthened overall
4. Does the DFD have clear/articulated expectations for the assistant chiefs?
 - not as clear as they should be
 - absolutely not – lots of ambiguity
5. How do you evaluate if the assistant chief job is being performed satisfactorily?

- how do we do via incident critiques, did the mission get accomplished appropriately?, were the proper resources used, citizen/staff/firefighter complaints, direct observation – very close office next door, regular staff meetings
 - quantitative – frequency/number of complaints regarding actions/issues, qualitative – personal/professional standards of doing a good job
6. What type of training should assistant chiefs pursue to better their capability to perform in their position?
 - pursue incident management training – most important is tactical, safety training related to emergency operations, human relations – fire service specific, personnel management of firefighters
 - some are the same required of captains – the ability to instruct/communicate effectively, command area – self-confidence, need training to command, people/leadership issues, skill areas like computer operations, “around here you are thrown in to sink or swim”
 7. Should the DFD provide training for the assistant chiefs? What would you like to see provided?
 - yes – formal syllabus – verification to ascertain knowledge of routine operations, roles/responsibilities, incident command
 - yes and no – the department should provide appropriate training but individuals should also show a willingness to take initiative and attend outside training to build skills, self-development commitment
 8. What should the assistant chiefs do to help you do your job better/support/improve DFD operations?
 - keep the fire chief informed to help him make strategic and non-strategic decisions, look at ways at how we can improve, stay current in thoughts/trends in the fire service, take initiative to suggest and implement improvements, point out organizational weaknesses and suggestions on making us stronger
 - take a broader interest in what is going on across the 3 shifts in order to coalesce into one department, they should demand that shifts funnel information through them, tough to keep people informed due to shifts/stations etc...
 9. Do you feel we adequately prepare the fill-in assistant chiefs? Explain..
 - “I think they’re adequately prepared – they usually have lots of experience”, history shows only a few problems, could be better – especially new fill-ins
 - No – rudimentary things, don’t agree with the process of seniority for fill-ins – provides a lack of incentive for people to try/get a “taste” of the job.
 10. What should the assistant chiefs do to better prepare the fill-in assistant chiefs?
 - work together to prepare a more organized training program for fill-in assistant chiefs
 - not sure they should do anything differently, see individuals instructing, hard to teach and frustrating for a job they had to learn by “the seat of their pants”

pants”, fill-ins should be a dedicated position, steep learning curve Having been there), this issue should be addressed

11. What should the DFD do to better prepare employees for this role?
 - lots of components for fill-ins important for all especially captains – mock incidents – training assistant chiefs but wide-ranging participation, develop the culture of our haz-mat program utilizing role playing/checklists like G.P taught
 - a structured program should be available along with some personal responsibility required
12. Are there duties performed by regular assistant chief’s that should not be performed by fill-ins?
 - yes – disciplinary duties, some coaching, supervisory issues, long-term decisions – policy related, could suggest but rely on regular assistant’s input/participation
 - yes – some things should be done in consultation with others – expenditures, it is good to ask yourself if the next person up the chain needs to be consulted
13. In your opinion, is there an operational difference when the regular assistant chief is gone?
 - yes – regular assistant chiefs are more role familiar, fill-ins not quite as smooth/effortless occasionally, understandably, things slip through the cracks but would be true anywhere a person does a job only on rare occasions
 - yes – things are very tentative, there is a lack of familiarity with the fill-ins response to issues
14. Philosophically speaking, should we fill-in the assistant chief position differently? How?
 - philosophically, they should be tested and assigned on a regular basis, this happens now to a degree with long-term fill-ins but I don’t know how structurally we could make the changes
 - yes – have those chosen to promote test for the fill-in position, absolutely object to seniority as the total qualifier – it is a ridiculous way to fill one of the most important jobs on the fire department
15. Is it important for a fill-in to spend time with the regular assistant chief? How much?
 - yes – optimal time is unclear, a fire scene would be a good time to draw a fill-in out of the pack, spend time with and review
 - yes – mostly due to lack of support training for the position, in the perfect world 6 months with the regular assistant chief would be good
16. What parts of the DFD operations manual must a fill-in assistant chief be most familiar?
 - first 5 sections of the emergency operations manual that lay out our emergency response strategy
 - all – may not remember all the details but know where things are referenced

17. How consistent are operations between the shifts?
 - some alarm responses differences that will disappear with our enhanced districts, some differences in radio traffic – relatively minor, overall, shifts are equally effective, it is hard to overcome personalities/individual differences
 - difference due in part to office structure but there is an attempt to make things work, it is difficult to make consensus work in the office, discussions are good, explore an authority line within the assistant chiefs office
18. Should the assistant chief role change? If so, how?
 - like the present role of the assistant chiefs, would like to see more self-directed work in certain areas, when you do the routine you get to know your people, it is good for the assistant's to keep that routine intact
 - not sure role should change, easy to lose control of routine operations – the day to day activities, continuity is tough

Fire Captain Interviews: (3 interviews)

Questions:

1. Do you notice any differences on the emergency scene with fill-in assistant chiefs?
 - fill-ins are more dependent on Headquarters rigs in terms of response and on-scene activities, see more direction from regular assistant chiefs
 - feel more personal responsibility – pay more attention when a fill-in is on duty, its not that we don't have confidence but if we're not used to the person, have to more closely monitor scene activities
 - used to being told what to do—less of that with a fill-in
2. Do you view your role differently when a fill-in assistant chief is on duty?
 - sometimes the fill-ins look more to the captains for assistance than the regular assistant chiefs
 - yes – sometimes assist more with panel locations, reports, help with Headquarters things, making on-scene suggestions in a tactful manner
 - I find myself spending more time outside looking at things than I do when a regular assistant chief is on duty. I feel more responsible for big picture issues

Fire Investigator Interview: (1 interview)

Questions:

1. What differences do you note in terms of your responses to fire scenes when a fill-in assistant chief is on duty?
 - a regular assistant chief has a better understanding of when to call an investigator – get called more from the fill-ins(which is just fine and expected)probably due to their having less investigation experience, there

is usually better scene preparation when a regular assistant chief is on duty, there does not seem to be as much overall control of a fire scene – again probably due to less multiple company command experience, fill-ins might still be in the “captain mode”, fill-ins are good but there is a big difference